

Area men learning how to bring ministry to prisons

Prison Ministry Leadership training program launched by Lewis University.



Terry Tuttle of Springfield, who works for Illinois Dept. of Corrections as an information services specialist, is part of a Prison Ministry Leadership training program launched in August by Lewis University and the Catholic Conference. (Photo by Justin L. Fowler/The State Journal-Register)

By **Steven Spearie** November 23, 2013

The first time Philip Huber went into Graham Correctional Center in Hillsboro to conduct Catholic Bible study last year, an inmate recognized him as a former shift commander for the Illinois Department of Corrections.

Huber, 51, decided to go into prison ministry after retiring in April 2012 from a 31-year career with IDOC, including 12 years as a lieutenant in internal affairs division at the Taylorville Correctional Center. Huber went into prison ministry at the urging of his pastor, the Rev. Daniel Willenborg, the liaison for prison ministry for the Springfield Catholic Diocese, as a way to give back to the community.

The inmate, Huber said, was curious about his newfound role, on the other side of the bars.

“He asked me, ‘Why do you want to come in here?’” Huber recalled. “By now, I think they realize that I want to share Jesus Christ with them and help them become closer to him.

“(Prison) is a different environment. When I worked for IDOC, I always tried to be respectful of the inmates.”

Huber and Terry Tuttle of Springfield, who also works for IDOC as an information services specialist, are part of a Prison Ministry Leadership training program launched in August by Lewis University and the Catholic Conference of Illinois (CCI).

Eight students from the state’s six Catholic dioceses are participating in workshops and online classes during the 15-month program. At the end, students will be certified from the American Catholic Correctional Chaplains Association, an organization accredited by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The Illinois program is one of only two curricula nationally certified by the chaplains Association.

While the Springfield diocese doesn’t have its own training program for volunteers, Huber and Tuttle are expected to play a larger role once they’ve completed the program with Willenborg, also the pastor at St. Louis Parish in Nokomis, in coordinating volunteers — priests, permanent deacons, professed religious and lay persons – who go into the 12 federal and state prisons around the diocese, six of which are in the Springfield area.

Tuttle, 49, started by conducting Communion services for inmates at the Taylorville prison about 10 years ago. When Tuttle found out the priest who was holding the services had been re-assigned, he mentioned it to then-Springfield diocese Bishop George Lucas.

“Without missing a beat, Bishop Lucas told me to find out what I needed to do to get in there,” Tuttle recalled.

“I was just willing to go in and do what needed to be done. That was the biggest thing.”

Tuttle, married, a father of five children and a parishioner at Blessed Sacrament in Springfield, now conducts a Catholic bible study session at Taylorville and fills in for Willenborg when he can’t make the weekly Communion service. Tuttle has also run Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) classes, a process in which adults are introduced to the church more fully.